



# Foggy Bottom Rambles



FLO's Best Resources

October/November 2009

## What to Find

- Gossip? Just stop it
- Calendars and coloring
- Saving money
- UT community meetup, Nov. 15
- Fish at the palace
- Grilled cheese

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## Unaccompanied Tour Newsletter

Hi community,

We're happy to announce you can access this and all the previous unaccompanied tour (UT) newsletters on the FLO website: <http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c23119.htm>. This is our second edition of our new and improved newsletter and we hope you enjoy reading it! In this issue you'll find Tips from the Field, Websites and Information, Around Town, Who Moved My Hooch, Book Club, Guest Columnist, and Rambles' Musings. Send comments, questions, suggestions, and articles to us at [FLOaskUT@state.gov](mailto:FLOaskUT@state.gov). Happy reading! We're kicking off this issue with an article that recently appeared in the Kabul Khourier, Embassy Kabul's post newsletter, with permission from the authors.

-Bridget and Sherri (FLO UT Team)

### Gossip – a Destructive Force!

By Health Unit Kabul (Dr. Mike Morris and Mary Anne Murphy, FSHP)

Security is a very real concern of Embassy Kabul. Before we arrive, we receive training on how to protect ourselves with lessons on survival, administering first aid and receive a helmet and body armor for added protection. However, we may find ourselves defenseless against another serious threat -- gossip.

Working, eating, socializing and living in close quarters at Embassy Kabul presents unique challenges. The closeness of our environment can fertilize the ground and sprout a garden of the human frailty -- gossip. Gossip destroys the human spirit, implodes offices, and causes pain and suffering. Here are tips on dealing with gossip:

1. Just say no! Don't lend a curious ear to gossip. Rise above it and make it clear that you are not interested in hearing the —juicy story||.
2. Don't pass it on! If you've been involved in gossip -- stop it now. Snuff out the fire; don't add fuel.
3. Take the lead! If you are a supervisor, make it clear that you will not tolerate gossip in your office. Approach the gossipers and ask them to stop.
4. Set the record straight! If someone is gossiping about you, calmly confront them. Ask for help to stop the rumors.
5. Remember everyone carries a heavy load! Be a good neighbor. Don't add to anyone's burden by participating in gossip.

Help stop the destructive effects of gossip – be part of the solution, not the problem!

## Tips from the Field

### *A penny for your thoughts*



My wife is serving on an unaccompanied tour in Kabul. In order to help the children learn something about Afghanistan and feel closer to my wife, we spent the week before our daughter's ninth birthday learning all about Afghanistan. Instead of presents on her birthday, we asked her friends to bring pennies so we could give them to Greg Mortenson's Pennies For Peace program. The party was a huge success; everyone learned something, we collected a huge jar of pennies to give away and my daughter loved telling her mom all about it. Learn more at <http://www.penniesforpeace.org/>.

### *You say it's your birthday...*

Create a family calendar, either electronic or print. My wonderful husband did this for me BEFORE he left for Islamabad and it has been great. We have all the normal birthdays (yep I remembered my mother-in-law's), plus we update it with the kids soccer games, important tests-the whole family has gotten involved! We all feel connected and it has really helped remembering those easy to forget dates.

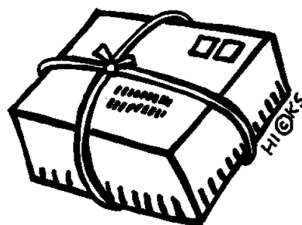
January	February	March
April	May	June
July	August	September
October	November	December

### *You don't always have to color in the lines*

We took family photos and converted them to black and white coloring books for the kids. Here's a pretty easy to follow online guide for how to do it using computer programs like Photoshop or other photo manipulation software. [http://www.ehow.com/how\\_2311270\\_make-coloring-book-digital-pictures.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_2311270_make-coloring-book-digital-pictures.html). Also, tips on how to assemble a coloring book once you printed out the images (remember to use heavier paper stock especially when coloring with markers!) can be found here: [http://www.ehow.com/how\\_4855139\\_make-coloring-book-young-children.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_4855139_make-coloring-book-young-children.html).

### *All things considered*

I'm at a PRT in Iraq and because things change here so quickly, I contacted one of the State people over there to find out about what it was really like and what I needed to bring, what it was like traveling there, and how internet/phone is set up so I could tell



my family ahead of time what to expect. I also asked if there was anything the people at the PRT missed that I could bring out with me. Yes, I only brought one suitcase, but actually mailed them a little 'care package' before I left. Even though I arrived dusty and tired, I made a good first impression!

Giving back

Family calendar

Coloring books

Plan ahead

## Websites and Information

### *Social networking sites, slowly taking over the world*

There's no denying it, social networking sites are here to stay and you have three more you can join!

- **Foreign Service Tandem Couples**, a Facebook group, is open to same-sex and opposite-sex tandem couples, for couples who were once tandem, and for future tandem couples. The group can be used as a forum to ask questions regarding bidding, benefits, and other issues, and to connect with other Foreign Service tandem couples. To join the group, go to [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) and search "Foreign Service Tandem Couples" and ask to join.
- **AFSA** (American Foreign Service Association) also has a Facebook page and encourages members and other interested parties to visit the page and become "fans" of AFSA. Go directly to the site: <http://www.facebook.com/afsapage> to join.
- **FS Pets** Yahoo group is a group for Foreign Service employees and family members to discuss pets and pet-related issues: moving, boarding, import and export requirements, etc., and any personal stories about the FS life with pets. Send a request to join to [FSPets-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:FSPets-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

Yahoo groups and

Facebook

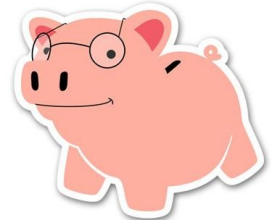
Saving money

Finding help

Money again

### *Don't be a smarty pants, be a smarty pig!*

What to do with the extra money you're getting from danger pay, hardship, etc.? Smarty Pig ([www.smartypig.com](http://www.smartypig.com)) is a site that allows you to open a free account to put away money to save for a specific 'goal'. Others can even contribute to the account and Smarty Pig also functions as a social network.



"Huh?" you may be thinking...So if mom's not sure what to get you for your birthday, ask her to make a contribution to the account. Saving money for your new kitchen or exotic vacation may be easier and more fun than you think!

### *When the going gets tough, the tough seek help*

While surfing the web for articles and resources for our UT community, we came across a good web site for health issues: <http://www.militarymentalhealth.org>. We all have ups and downs in life and some of these may be temporary due to an unaccompanied tour. If you find yourself worrying more, unsure of what to expect after the UT, or started to drink more, you may want to check out these brochures:

[When worry gets out of control](#)

[War-zone related stress reactions: What families need to know](#)

[Tips for cutting down on drinking](#)

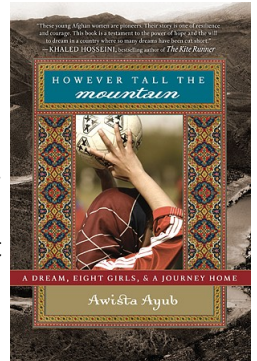
### *I work all night, I work all day, to pay the bills I have to pay*

See, even ABBA has trouble making ends meet at times. Want a free, online service to help you make better purchase decisions for complex product categories? If so, check out Billshrink at <http://www.billshrink.com/> to cost compare cell phones and plans, gas, credit cards, and savings & CDs. Their motto is "Saving you money, one bill at a time" so find out if you're paying too much. Every little bit helps!

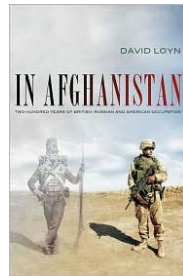
## Book Club

### *However tall the mountain* by Awista Ayub

This book illustrates how small things can make a huge difference. Eight girls, ages 10 to 16, are brought to the U.S. to play American style soccer for six weeks in 2004. All of these girls had lived through the nightmare era of the Taliban and some had been prevented from attending school. In the U.S., they were exposed not only to American culture, but were playing an organized sport that attracted crowds of people. The author is the director of the Afghan Youth Sports Exchange and emigrated from Kabul to Connecticut when the Soviet coup took over the country in 1978. The book follows the girls in the U.S. and back to their war-torn towns in Afghanistan.



### *In Afghanistan* by David Loyn



Okay this is a non-fiction book, but I think you might enjoy reading it. Loyn does a good job of covering the history of the country. Occasionally the book is difficult to read due to the sheer amount of detail the author uses and due to some of the violence he talks about but I found I could "skip" parts and do okay. Loyn has 30 years of experience as a foreign correspondent, much of it spent in Afghanistan. He seems to have a huge knowledge of the Taliban and the forces inside the country.

### *Trespassing* by Uzma Aslam Khan

This book has a cornucopia of characters and locations - mulberry farms, student cafeterias, bus body shops, water authorities, and American academia in the throes of the first Gulf war. Daanish has come home for his father's funeral and finds his mother has planned a marriage for him. Instead of accepting the women Daanish's mother has chosen for him, he falls for Dia - a strong, modern, woman in love with the business of silk worms. They both have secrets in their lives, some of which they themselves are not aware. This book is an interesting peek into Pakistani lives and family and is a fun read with great snapshots of modern life in Pakistan.



However tall the  
mountain

In Afghanistan

Trespassing

Disclaimer

The Foggy Bottom Rambles is published every month by the State Department's Family Liaison Office's (FLO) Unaccompanied Tours (UT) Office. It is intended for employees who will be and are serving at unaccompanied posts and their family members. The views presented herein are not the official policies of the Department of State or the United States Government. Any mention of commercial products, information services, travel destinations or any other resource does not constitute endorsement by any official entity and is provided exclusively for the personal convenience and entertainment of our readers. Portion of disclaimer originated from Tigris Times. Direct any and all questions, comments, suggestions, or contributions to [FLOaskUT@state.gov](mailto:FLOaskUT@state.gov).

## Around Town...DC that is

Don't worry if you're not in DC, some of these info blurbs have resources for you wherever you may be!

### *It's a beautiful day in this neighborhood*

And we hope you'll join us for another UT community gathering of folks in the DC area on **November 15 from 2-4 PM in Arlington, VA**. This is a great opportunity to meet others in the area who are or will be experiencing an unaccompanied tour. Members of the Family Liaison Office (FLO) staff will also be present to answer questions. Children are welcome, and representatives from the Foreign Service Youth Foundation (FSYF) will be there to make this event extra fun for them. Read the details: <http://www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c23852.htm> and RSVP to [FLOaskUT@state.gov](mailto:FLOaskUT@state.gov).

### *Because we all like to chow down once in a while*

Food-lovers worldwide gather virtually at Chowhound ([www.chowhound.com](http://www.chowhound.com)) to swap expert tips about restaurants, foods, stores, and bars, as well as [cooking](#), [wine](#), [beer](#), [cookware](#), and more. Recent postings for the DC area include: "Store with large selection of kim chee", "Cold weather = saltenas...new places to try", and "Restaurants open in Ellicott City or Columbia on Thanksgiving". We found a post for "Favorite Afghan Restaurants in DC area" too: <http://chowhound.chow.com/topics/400148>.

# CHOWHOUND

### *UT in the news*

The October issue of *State Magazine* has a blurb on page 5 that mentions the Foreign Service youth honored at July's awards ceremony that included children who received medals and certificates of recognition for a parent serving on an unaccompanied tour. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/130742.pdf>

### *Lavash and Torshi and Biryani - oh my!*

Sherri and her family recently ate at an Afghan restaurant in the DC area called Bamian in Falls Church so this got us wondering what other restaurants are in the area with cuisine from some of our unaccompanied posts. So we did a quick search of Afghan and Middle Eastern restaurants and found out that there are quite a few. Not sure how authentic they are, but we'd love to hear from you if you have been out to that region about which is best. We'd be happy to get a group together to go try some if you're interested. We heard there's a good place on Route 1 as well. Send any reviews our way and let the restaurant wars begin! (Note: we found quite a few through [www.yelp.com](http://www.yelp.com) which is not just for the DC area.) This just in— a FLO staff member just told us that the name of the restaurant on Route 1 is....wait for it...the Afghan Restaurant!



Upcoming  
gathering in DC

Chowhound

FS Youth honored

Restaurants



## A Visit to Camp Victory: The Fish at Al-Faw Palace, By Karl Olson

Everyone at Al-Faw Palace loves the Fish! These are giant carp, or “Saddam Bass,” or some such species especially bred for Saddam and his cronies. The U.S. military presence over six years has conditioned them to hang around on the right side of the bridge as it approaches the Palace, at a location dubbed “Carp Corner,” where all ranks watch them dine.



The Fish benefit from a loophole in General Order Number 1, which bans both feeding wild animals and keeping pets. The Fish are not “wild,” and nobody is keeping them; they just live in the lake. They’ll eat just about anything, including Wild Kingdom-style live cuisine, and put on a good show while dining. This inspires photographers, videographers, and haiku poets.

There is now a Fish website, <http://thefishatalfawpalace.blogspot.com/>, where Fish fans can share pics, vids and thoughts. One can write to the Fish at: [thefishatalfawpalace@gmail.com](mailto:thefishatalfawpalace@gmail.com). Of course, the Fish are so busy ‘working’ at Al-Faw Palace that it’s not easy for them to go to MWR to check the computer, so they ask for your patience. The Fish hope to go on a WebCam soon and welcome any suggestions or assistance in this area.

It’s quite clear that the Fish at Al-Faw Palace are part of Iraq’s Cultural Heritage that should be preserved for future generations all over the world. Several personnel look forward to returning to Iraq in a few years as tourists, to see this mysterious capital city on the other side of the T-walls, and, of course, to feed the Fish.

(Note: the author is a Foreign Service Officer most recently serving in Iraq. Photos courtesy of blog.)

Fish, fish, and  
more fish!



## Who Moved My Hooch?

*Mary, Mary, quite contrary, how does your garden grow? With Café jars and Afghan seeds and pretty hooches all in a row!*

Here's how you can make a terrarium fit for a hooch:

- Find a good sized bottle
- Use it upright or turn it on its side.
- Layer damp sand and small pebbles on the floor of the bottle. Consider a layer of activated charcoal to absorb any smells and a layer of moss to keep the soil from settling. Add your soil. Choose seeds from small plants with similar requirements that can stand a good deal of humidity.
- Place your **mini-greenhouse** in medium sun and tend it carefully.



For more details, see [WikiHow](#). (image via [Medoria's Flickr Page](#))

*A horse ! A horse! My kingdom for a horse! Or maybe just a cup of buttermilk*

Okay so you don't always have everything you need in the kitchen (and even a more limited supply in a hooch) and might have limited ingredients on hand. So, you may need to consult a [substitution guide](#) like the one from allrecipes.com.

No kitchen? Just nuke it:

[Microwave Meal Magic](#)

[Microwave Cooking Recipes](#)

[Microwave Recipes](#)



No microwave? Just iron it:

When is an **iron not just an iron**? When it's a grilled cheese maker! Besides an iron, the other ingredients you need are tin foil, bread, and cheese. For more details on using your iron as a Panini press or quesadilla maker and other clever dorm (or hooch) dining tips check out [Campus cooking – the advanced course](#).

For extra fun, have a grilled cheese [Throwdown](#) a la Food Network star Bobby Flay or turn up the heat in your own Kitchen Stadium the Iron Chef way. Not a grilled cheese fan? You could think about hosting a “**cooking in your hooch**” demonstration, class, or competition. Please be safe when cooking (remember contents may be hot) and have fun!

Mini greenhouse

Clever 'cooking'

## Rambles' Musings

*Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water...*

... but how would they empty the bathtub?

It doesn't hurt to take a hard look at yourself from time to time. This little test should help you get started.

During a visit to a mental asylum, a visitor asked the Director what the criteria are that define if a patient should be institutionalized.

"Well," said the Director, "we fill up a bathtub. Then we offer a teaspoon, a teacup, and a bucket to the patient and ask the patient to empty the bathtub."

Okay, here's your test:

Would you use the spoon?

Would you use the teacup?

Would you use the bucket?



"Oh, I understand," said the visitor. "A normal person would choose the bucket, as it is larger than the spoon."

What was the director's response?

*Give up?*

No," answered the Director. "A normal person would pull the plug."

So, how did *\*YOU\** do?

For more brain teasers and games visit

<http://www.braingle.com/>

*Ha ha!*

### Who to Contact

Unaccompanied Tours Direct:

[FLOaskUT@state.gov](mailto:FLOaskUT@state.gov)

The Family Liaison Office

(M/DGHR/FLO)

Harry S Truman Building,

Room 1239

Department of State

Washington, DC 20520

Tel: (202) 647-1076,

or (800) 440-0397



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